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New York

President:	Mr. Kumalo	(South Africa)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Kafando
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Jurica
	France	Mr. Ripert
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Spatafora
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Khalilzad
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007) (S/2008/266)

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08-31961 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007) (S/2008/266)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq, in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Hamid Al Bayati (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the course of the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/266, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (2007).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and His Excellency Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States, on behalf of the Multinational Force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pascoe.

Mr. Pascoe: I am grateful for this opportunity to be here today to discuss the situation in Iraq and the stepped up efforts of the United Nations to help the Iraqi Government and people. I have just visited Baghdad from 19 to 21 April, and attended the third expanded ministerial meeting of Iraq and its neighbours on 22 April in Kuwait.

The Security Council has before it the third report (S/2008/266) issued pursuant to resolution 1770 (2007). It reflects the progress achieved by the United Nations in its expanded role under the new mandate. The report highlights the challenges facing Iraq and the concerted efforts by the Government of Iraq, neighbouring countries, the United Nations and the wider international community to address them.

We are all aware of the difficult situation in Iraq. Despite improvements in security, the Government of Iraq continues to face formidable challenges to the process of national reconciliation. Some important steps were taken in January of this year — such as the passing of the Justice and Accountability Law replacing earlier de-baathification policies and a package of laws that include the Law on Governorates not Organized into a Region, the General Amnesty Law and the 2008 budget. There are also encouraging signs that the Arab Sunni front, the Tawafuq, could return to the Government soon.

Together with security improvements, those steps create a window of opportunity that we need to pursue. As the Secretary-General's report highlights, it is imperative that Iraqi leaders maintain that positive momentum and take further steps to resolve other fundamental issues that continue to divide Iraqis, such as the sharing of natural resources and an agreement on the federal structure of the Iraqi State. Those goals could be achieved through the adoption of a fair and equitable hydrocarbon law and the completion of the long-delayed constitutional review process. There are some indications that progress may be made in those areas as well. The United Nations strongly encourages those efforts and continues to provide the Constitutional Review Committee with technical advice and assistance.

Let me say here that the Council's adoption of resolution 1770 (2007) and its broadened mandate for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) came at a critical time and provides a firm basis for our work in Iraq. The Secretary-General's

Special Representative and his highly motivated staff are carrying out the mandate by expanding their assistance to the Government and people. While the tasks are daunting, UNAMI's enhanced efforts are appreciated by Iraqis. The reputation of the United Nations as an organization that provides valuable assistance is growing.

Pursuant to the mandate under resolution 1770 (2007) and following the agreed six-month extension of article 140 of the Iraqi constitution after its expiry on 31 December 2007, UNAMI has made the resolution of disputed internal territories a top priority. UNAMI has conducted a number of field visits to several disputed areas to meet with local leaders and understand their concerns. It has facilitated a dialogue in several contested areas in order to build confidence and momentum among the parties. The Mission will make recommendations with regard to the principles and methodology that could be used by Iraqi stakeholders as part of a common approach to tackle the most highly disputed territories, including the city of Kirkuk. We appeal to Member States to support United Nations efforts and encourage the parties concerned to work together to find lasting solutions.

UNAMI continues to support the Iraq Electoral Commission in its preparations to conduct election activities that are seen as credible by the Iraqi people. Special Representative De Mistura, with the support of the Iraqi leadership, announced on 14 February that UNAMI would move forward the process of selecting the directors of several governorate election offices in cases where there had been no consensus among the political parties to complete the appointment process. That process — now almost completed — is an excellent example of how the United Nations can add value in Iraq. I urge the Council of Representatives to forward the list of candidates for the Baghdad electoral offices as soon as possible, to allow the process to be completed.

The Iraqi Electoral Commission is currently focused on organizing a voter registration update to take place throughout Iraq in June, after which Governorate Council elections are scheduled for 1 October. However, as the report notes, this timeline depends on political agreements that must be reached in the coming weeks, particularly with regard to voter registration eligibility and inclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs). A new governorate election law must be written and adopted by the Council of Representatives as soon as possible.

The humanitarian situation in Iraq continues to be of great concern and provides ample evidence of the impact that violence in Iraq has on civilians on a daily basis. In particular, the United Nations is monitoring the situation in the Sadr City area of Baghdad and in the city of Basra and is assessing the humanitarian needs. The United Nations is committed to working with all relevant actors concerned to ensure that urgent assistance reaches the most vulnerable civilians. I believe we can do more as our presence on the ground increases and, along with it, the opportunities for additional activities.

We must also focus our efforts on alleviating the suffering of Iraq's refugees and internally displaced persons, not only on humanitarian grounds, but also because it has regional repercussions. While only lasting political solution in Iraq can solve the current refugee and IDP crisis, we believe that the Government of Iraq and the wider international community, with the help of the United Nations can and must do more in the interim to help host countries, particularly Jordan and Syria, with humanitarian assistance. In that regard, I would like to note the recent deployment of three personnel of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to Baghdad. The positive impact of their presence is already being felt.

The Secretary-General's latest report once again expresses serious concern about the current human rights situation in Iraq. Despite improvements in the general security situation towards the end of 2007, suicide bombings, car bombs and other attacks continued, with devastating consequences for civilians, in the first quarter of 2008. However, on a positive note, a number of measures have been taken by the executive and judicial authorities in Iraq to improve the handling of detainees, including efforts to ensure more effective judicial oversight and to alleviate overcrowding. In this context, the UNAMI Human Rights Office continues to visit the Government's detention facilities and prisons at the invitation of the relevant authorities in Baghdad and Arbil.

The support of neighbouring countries is essential for the stability of Iraq. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I attended the third expanded ministerial conference of Iraq and its neighbours, in Kuwait on

22 April. It was an opportunity for participating countries to reaffirm their commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity, unity, full sovereignty and independence, and to the principle of non-interference in its internal affairs. In the final communiqué, the participants condemned all acts of terrorism and reaffirmed the obligation of all States to combat terrorist activities. As always, these meetings also offer invaluable opportunities along the margins for participants to hold wide-ranging discussions of critical bilateral issues. The participants also expressed their desire to hold the next expanded ministerial meeting in Baghdad. The United Nations is committed to supporting this regional process through technical assistance to the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to three regional Working Groups, on energy, on border security and on refugees and IDPs. The United Nations strongly encourages Iraq and its regional neighbours to step up their dialogue and interaction with a view to strengthening cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Since its launch in Sharm el-Sheikh in May 2007, the International Compact with Iraq has emerged as a key framework for cooperation between Iraq and international donors in the areas of security, political matters, governance, reconstruction and economic and social recovery. It also provides a guide for focusing assistance on Iraq's most critical problems. In this context, I would like to thank the Government of Sweden for agreeing to host the first Iraq Compact annual review conference, which is to be held in Stockholm on 29 May 2008 at the Foreign Minister level. The conference, to be chaired by the Secretary-General and Prime Minister al-Maliki, will be an opportunity to review the progress made in achieving the objectives of the Compact and discuss further steps towards those goals. We strongly encourage member States to take part in this event and to make concrete commitments at the conference.

As the Secretary-General has said strongly and clearly, whatever one's previous views on Iraq, the whole world has a responsibility and an interest today in helping bring peace and prosperity to the people of that country. I returned from my Iraq visit convinced that the United Nations is doing its best in this regard. While taking strict measures to deal with the security situation, the United Nations is playing an enhanced role in Iraq. The Secretary-General has increased the United Nations presence in Baghdad to 140 and in Arbil to 40 international staff. In addition, an outreach programme, which places national liaison officers in each of the Governor's offices, has deployed 9 such officers so far, and the United Nations has re-established its presence in Basra. Expanding the United Nations presence to Najaf, Ramadi and Kirkuk is currently being contemplated. UNAMI and the country team have also adopted an area-based approach, which expands activities where circumstances are more permissible. I have mentioned UNHCR's valuable presence in Baghdad, and I trust that other agencies will soon enhance their role there as well. The Mission also continues to work to become more self-sufficient in areas of logistical support and security, and plans to build a new integrated headquarters in Baghdad have been developed.

During my visit to Baghdad, I met with Special Representative De Mistura and the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. I took advantage of the opportunity to thank them on behalf of the Secretary-General for their dedication and hard work under very challenging conditions. I was struck by the professionalism of the staff and the esprit de corps within the Mission. Special Representative De Mistura has done an exemplary job at motivating staff and keeping them focused on carrying out their mandate. I believe the United Nations can take great pride in their work in an extremely difficult environment.

Several times during my visit, I was reminded of the risks that our staff face when the alarm systems sounded and instructed staff to take cover from the threat of indirect fire. The Secretariat remains deeply conscious of the security threat, and the Department of Safety and Security, with our assistance, works to constantly upgrade mitigating measures in order to enhance the safety of our personnel in Iraq.

During my meetings with Iraqi and other interlocutors, there was common theme: all expressed appreciation for the enhanced role of the United Nations in Iraq. In Baghdad, I met with Vice-President Adel Abdul Mahdi and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, who welcomed the role that the United Nations is playing with respect to the resolution of disputed internal territories, preparations for governorate elections before the end of the year, assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons, and facilitating political dialogue and national reconciliation. They also thanked the United Nations for its efforts in supporting humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, and in particular, helping to

build a positive political momentum for the development and implementation of the International Compact with Iraq. Their comments were echoed by Foreign Minister Zebari and in numerous other speakers at the regional conference in Kuwait. These statements serve as in important reminder that the role of the United Nations enjoys the respect of Iraqi and regional leaders.

We appreciate the support of Council members for UNAMI's efforts to fulfil its mandate in Iraq. We are grateful to those Member States that have provided protection and logistical support to the United Nations presence in Iraq, including those providing air support and troops and funding for the distinct entity to provide security for UNAMI. I would also urge member States to provide additional financial and logistical resources for the Mission, including funding for the new integrated United Nations facility in Baghdad, and additional required security arrangements, in particular the provision of additional military advisers to UNAMI.

Iraq is going through a painful transition. The challenges of national reconciliation, reconstruction and development after decades of dictatorship and war are massive. I was impressed, however, by the seriousness and commitment of the Government of Iraq to address these challenges with a view to ending the suffering and achieving a tangible improvement in the lives of the Iraqi people. This is a long-term endeavour that requires the sustained support of the international community. The United Nations is committed to playing its full part in accordance with its comprehensive mandate in Security Council resolution 1770 (2007). The Council's continued support is vital to that effort.

The President: I thank Mr. Pascoe for his briefing.

I now call on His Excellency Mr. Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent Representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Khalilzad (United States of America): It is my pleasure to report to the Council today on behalf of the Multinational Forces in Iraq (MNF-I), as requested by Security Council resolutions 1546 (2004), 1637 (2005), 1723 (2006) and 1790 (2007). I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the submission of his report on the progress made by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (S/2008/266) as well as Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing to the Council. The United States expresses its appreciation to Special Representative Staffan de Mistura and all the staff of UNAMI for their courageous efforts, dedication and hard work.

The United States shares with the people of Iraq the goal of achieving a secure, unified and democratic Iraq that can govern, defend and sustain itself. In early 2007, President Bush and the Government of Iraq approved increases in the numbers of coalition and Iraqi forces to ensure the security of Iraqi communities and to promote reconciliation at the local and national levels.

The overall security environment in Iraq continues to improve, and there have been some gains on the political, economic and diplomatic fronts as well. Nevertheless, progress has been uneven in certain areas, and many challenges remain.

The average weekly number of security incidents has decreased since my last report, and the level of violence nationwide continues to be significantly lower than the levels seen in late summer 2007. Although there was a brief rise in security incidents in recent weeks as a result of the violence in Baghdad and Basra, the level of incidents is going down once again. The number of civilian deaths due to violence has fallen by more than 72 per cent since July 2007 and continues to be below the levels seen in February 2006, prior to the Samarra mosque bombing. Coalition deaths have dropped by more than 70 per cent since last summer as well.

Another important trend is the decrease in the number of deaths attributed to ethno-sectarian violence by 94 per cent nationwide and by 97 per cent in Baghdad security districts from January 2007 to January 2008. This steady decline in ethno-sectarian violence is due both to the increased presence of Iraqi and coalition forces along sectarian fault lines and to the decreased capacity of the enemy to reignite the cycle of ethno-sectarian violence.

Attacks per week involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are down by more than 50 per cent since last summer, and coalition deaths resulting from IED incidents have fallen to their lowest levels since July 2006. This drop in casualties is attributed to the significant disruption of insurgent networks, the effectiveness of physical security barriers and the increasing proportion of IEDs that are now found and

cleared before they can explode. The rate at which IEDs have been found and cleared recently exceeded 55 per cent — the highest in nearly four years. The level of high-profile attacks, such as car bombs and suicide attacks, remains far below its height a year ago, although there has been a small increase in the number of such attacks over the past few months. Nevertheless, their effectiveness is declining, owing to improvements in security.

During the reporting period, Iranian-backed groups launched numerous attacks on Iraqi civilians and Iraqi and multinational forces. The recent clashes between criminal and militia elements and Iraqi Government forces in Basra and Baghdad have highlighted Iran's destabilizing influence and actions. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds force continues to arm, train and fund illegal armed groups in Iraq. The bulk of the weapons used by these groups, including mortars, rockets and explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) are made in Iran and supplied by Iran. This illegal aid poses a significant threat to Iraqi and multinational forces and to the stability and sovereignty of Iraq. It also undermines the efforts of the Government of Iraq to rebuild the nation. These transfers of arms and related materials are fundamentally inconsistent with the restrictions on such transfers to Iraq adopted by the Council under its Chapter VII authority.

Iraq's border with Syria is another source of concern, as estimates suggest that Syria is the entry point for 90 per cent of all known foreign terrorists in Iraq. Syria continues to allow foreign fighters to transit Syria en route to conducting attacks in Iraq, and we know that Al-Qaida terrorist facilitators continue to operate inside Syria. Iran and Syria must stop the flow of weapons and foreign fighters into Iraq and their malign interference in Iraq.

Thirty-three countries currently play an indispensable role in supporting security in Iraq, either by participating in the coalition or by contributing to UNAMI operations. Coalition members other than the United States in Iraq contribute some 10,000 personnel to the coalition and another 450 personnel to support UNAMI. Specific contributions range from that of El Salvador, which has deployed nine contingents since 2003 and has completed more than 300 reconstruction projects, to that of Estonia, which has combat forces conducting counterinsurgency operations. These forces play an essential role in helping the Iraqi people achieve success.

The Iraqi Security Forces continue to make progress and to develop increased capability and proficiency. More than 540,000 individuals now serve in the Iraqi Security Forces — an increase of 24,000 since I last reported to the Council, in January. As of 1 February 2008, 123 Iraqi army combat battalions are conducting operations — an increase of 6 battalions since the last quarter. Of these combat battalions, 112 are capable of taking the lead in operations.

During recent operations, some Iraqi units were found wanting, but overall the Iraqi Security Forces are quite capable, and their performance is solid. Looking forward, we expect an additional 50,000 Iraqi soldiers and 16 army and special operations battalions to be trained before the end of the year, as well as more than 23,000 police and 8 national police battalions.

Local citizens, both Arab Sunni and Arab Shia, are also continuing to aid in the fight against extremists. These 91,000 volunteers, known as the Sons of Iraq, are fostering bottom-up reconciliation by providing Iraqi and coalition forces with information on insurgents, securing critical local infrastructure and aiding in the discovery of improvised explosive devices and weapons caches. We are working closely with the Iraqi Government to integrate many of these volunteers into vocational training programmes for the Iraqi Security Forces and other Government jobs.

The coalition continues to transfer responsibility for security to the Government of Iraq, which currently has primary security responsibility for 9 of the country's 18 provinces. Many of these provinces have transitioned smoothly, and, although challenges have arisen in others, we expect the process to move forward, with Anbar and Qadisiyah provinces transitioning later this year.

Turning now to economic issues, the ability of the Government of Iraq to spend its resources, to provide essential services and to promote economic development is progressing. The Iraqi Ministries of Defence and Interior are steadily improving their ability to execute their budgets. In 2007 and 2006, both ministries spent more on their forces than the United States provided through the Iraqi Security Forces Fund. We anticipate that Iraq will spend more than $9 billion on security this year and $11 billion next year.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that Iraq's gross domestic product will grow by 7 per cent in real terms this year. Food inflation for 2007 was approximately 12 per cent, compared to more than 32 per cent in 2006. The Iraqi dinar remains strong, and the Iraqi central bank has begun to bring down interest rates.

At the same time, as mentioned by Mr. Pascoe, there has been some political progress as well. The passage of the Accountability and Justice Law, which provides for de-baathification reform, the Amnesty Law and the Provincial Powers Law, which calls for provincial elections by 1 October 2008, were major steps forward. Much will depend, however, upon their successful implementation. Politically, Iraq's leaders must continue to cooperate with each other and place national interests above parochial ones.

Steps have also been taken to integrate Iraq into the international community, and specifically into regional affairs. On 21 April, the Foreign Ministers of the States Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and of Egypt, Jordan and the United States of America met in Bahrain and were joined by the Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hoshyar Zebari. We welcome the group's decision to make Iraq a regular participant in such meetings.

In closing, I would like to thank UNAMI for its work in helping to resolve disputed internal boundaries, dealing with the humanitarian issues facing the Iraqi people, co-chairing the International Compact with Iraq and preparing for provincial elections. The United Nations continues to play an important role in regional dialogue, and UNAMI's contribution to the expanded neighbours support mechanism will help ensure that that process will remain a valuable regional forum. In the weeks and the months ahead, we look forward to UNAMI's continued involvement in promoting national reconciliation, constitutional review, economic reform and capacity-building. We also encourage UNAMI to consider expanding its presence to other areas of Iraq.

The MNF-I and UNAMI must work to sustain the momentum achieved by the recent improvements in Iraq's security. The leaders and the people of Iraq must capitalize upon these hard-won gains against insurgents, extremists and criminals by assuming responsibility for achieving the objectives that Iraq has set for itself as an independent and sovereign State. I look forward to an enhanced commitment by all parties to take concrete steps towards assisting the Government of Iraq in achieving these goals.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his report (S/2008/266). I would also like to thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing to the Council on recent developments in Iraq. I also wish to thank the Permanent Representative of the United States, Ambassador Khalilzad, for his briefing on the activities of the multinational forces in Iraq. We welcome the presence of our brother Mr. Hamid Al Bayati, Permanent Representative of Iraq.

During our consideration of this item on 21 January (see S/PV.5823), hopes arose that the security situation would improve in the light of figures from the fourth quarter of 2007. According to the report before the Council at that meeting (S/2008/19), the number of violent incidents had fallen from 200 a day in July and August 2007 to approximately 90 in September and October. Unfortunately, the report before us today reflects a renewed upsurge of violent incidents, which average around 130 per day countrywide, and that figure does not take into account the most recent events. We hope that this situation is merely temporary.

Libya supports all efforts intended to bring an end to violence in Iraq, whether by rebuilding Iraq's armed forces or its other security and police forces or by the demilitarization of the militias, ensuring that only the Government engages in such operations to restore security and law and order. However, that can occur only if all factions and religious sects in Iraq truly believe that the door is open to equal participation in power and wealth-sharing. Fortunately, that is what the Government of Iraq is currently seeking to promote. We invite all political parties to genuinely participate in efforts to achieve national reconciliation and to foster dialogue and a spirit of accord.

That being said, however, we feel that real progress has been made on all fronts and we hope that such progress will continue. We also welcome improved economic figures, particularly last year's growth rate, and the expected upward trend this year.

My delegation is of the view that improved relations between Iraq and neighbouring countries, particularly Arab countries, are central to guaranteeing

Iraq's stability. We particularly encourage Iraq's endeavours in conjunction with its neighbours, and we welcome the statements emanating from the recent conference in Kuwait regarding the importance of respecting the national unity, full sovereignty, territorial integrity and Arab and Islamic identity of Iraq, as well as of respecting Iraq's internationally recognized borders, together with a commitment comprehensively to respect the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and the right of the Iraqi people freely to decide their political future and to administer their national wealth and resources and financial affairs as they see fit.

We welcome the political efforts made by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the expansion of its activities through the provincial liaison offices. We also welcome UNAMI's role in providing assistance, particularly to the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Constitution Review Committee, and to the Iraqi parliament as it enacts important legislation aimed at enhancing the security and political situation, the provincial Powers Law and the Law on Governorates.

We urge UNAMI, whose activities we highly commend, to undertake further action on the humanitarian front. Indeed, the reports of governmental and non-governmental organizations reveal that the situation is worrisome, particularly with regard to Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, as is the situation of internally displaced persons, millions of whom are living in deplorable conditions. February's report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and reports from non-governmental organizations all describe the magnitude of suffering and highlight the need to reach the target subscription of $265 million, only a small portion of which has been obtained. Even if the total amount were to be obtained, it would still be insufficient to meet the needs of all IDPs and refugees and to remedy the problems of the countries hosting them, Syria and Jordan in particular. Of course, it is Iraq's responsibility to cater to the needs of its own IDPs and refugees, but the international community also has a duty to help alleviate their suffering.

Another important humanitarian issue that is not addressed in the report concerns the legal and humanitarian situation of Iraqi detainees. We are under the impression that their number is steadily increasing. Some reports show that the number of detainees has now exceeded 51,000. We call on all concerned parties to remember that detainees also have legal rights that must be respected.

Lastly, I should like briefly to raise two other issues. The first relates to the request for supplies under the oil-for-food programme that ended on 31 December 2007. The legal and financial governmental entities of Iraq can meet the country's needs only if the legal documents are provided.

Secondly, the compensation committee is looking into Iraq's participation in activities to ensure that it can protect Iraq's legal and sovereign interests. It is doing so not in order to help Iraq shirk its responsibilities, but to encourage direct coordination between Iraq and its neighbours to find solutions acceptable to all parties that will alleviate material and other pressures.

We all know that Iraq is facing many challenges, but its history has always demonstrated the Iraqi people's ability to meet all challenges and overcome all difficulties with the utmost resilience and resolve.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. We also welcome Ambassador Khalilzad's briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

Since the war in Iraq began five years ago in March 2003, the political process, reconstruction and national reconciliation in Iraq have passed one important milestone after another. As a nation and as a society, Iraq has undergone significant changes, as have its relations with other countries in the region and with the international community. Iraq's progress in various fields deserves our full recognition, but we cannot overlook the formidable challenges that it continues to face in the political process and in the spheres of security, reconstruction, human rights and national reconciliation. Bombings and violent conflicts continue to occur with great frequency. Economic recovery and reconstruction are not yet on the right track, while progress in the key legislative and constitutional reform processes is slow. The national administrative, executive and security institutions remain weak. Large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons are unable to return to their homes. No effective guarantees are in place for civilian rights, including the rights of women and children.

An old Chinese proverb says that, in rowing a boat upstream, the only alternative to moving forward is to move backward. However, there is no question of going backward in the face of the various formidable challenges in Iraq. Iraq's only option is to join hands with the countries of the region and the international community in a concerted effort to adopt more effective measures, while its Government and people assume the primary responsibility for their own future. The possibility of a bright future for Iraq will hinge on the ability of all its political leaders to put the country's national interests above all else, to seek reconciliation and to establish consensus and cooperation.

We support the efforts of the Government of Iraq to adopt effective measures to ensure the national stability and unity that will foster the country's development. We hope that the Government of Iraq can join forces with other sectors to accelerate dialogue, reform legislation, strengthen accountability and intensify reconstruction and the protection of human rights in order to ensure further progress.

We are pleased that relations between Iraq and the other countries of the region continue to improve and strengthen, and that institutional cooperation on the issues of energy, refugees and border control has been established. We also welcome the successful conclusion of the third expanded meeting of foreign ministers of Iraq's neighbours, held last week in Kuwait. Such meetings instil confidence that cooperation in that area has a promising future. The improvement of relations between Iraq and its neighbours is of great benefit not only to Iraq itself, but to the region as a whole. The international community should recognize this and encourage and support such improvement.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), under the leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura, is an interface between the Security Council and the international community on the one hand and the Government of Iraq and its people on the other. China agrees that UNAMI should continue to carry out various operations in accordance with resolution 1770 (2007) in a step-by-step and focused manner. We recognize the accomplishments already achieved by UNAMI, and we hope that UNAMI will put forward rational and feasible proposals for the political process in Iraq so as to push forward Iraqi national reconciliation.

We expect UNAMI to continue to play a role in coordinating humanitarian relief activities in Iraq in a way that benefits the Iraqi people in general. Given the rapid rise in world food prices, UNAMI should cooperate with the Government of Iraq in the task of ensuring that the most basic humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people will be met. We also hope that UNAMI will become more proactive in protecting and promoting the human rights of the Iraqi people, including paying more attention to improving the conditions of refugees, internally displaced persons and detainees.

In the very long history of Iraq, five years is only a moment. However, to the 23 million Iraqi people, this moment is filled with tremendous difficulties. The international community should continue to focus attention on Iraq and to extend its hand to the Iraqi people in order to help Iraq find the road of stability and development as soon as possible.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Let me begin by thanking, as previous speakers have done, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing and the Secretary-General for his report.

My delegation also thanks the Permanent Representative of the United States for his statement on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

We would also like to acknowledge and welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Iraq at today's meeting.

In the past few years, Iraq has achieved notable progress. We welcome the continuing work of the democratic institutions in the country and the International Monetary Fund's projected gross domestic product growth rate of 7 per cent in 2008. This achievement is, of course, attributable to the hard work of the people and Government of Iraq, as well as to the support of the international community.

Yet, at the same time, serious challenges continue to cloud the security situation and stability in Iraq. The recent spiral of violence in various parts of Iraq, which has caused hundreds of fatalities and more than 1,000 casualties, is a clear indication of the continued importance of national consensus and unity through political dialogue and reconciliation.

It is a reconciliation that upholds such values as peace, justice and equality, freedom, tolerance, balance, and consultation.

We welcome, in this regard, the continued efforts of the Government of Iraq in promoting dialogue and reconciliation. The convening of a national reconciliation conference in Baghdad on 18 March 2008 was also a welcome step.

We recognize the reconciliation potential of a number of legislative measures in Iraq. In this regard, we welcome the adoption by the Council of Representatives of a package of laws on 13 February 2008, which could help achieve a national consensus on the sharing of power and resources. We also attach great importance to the agreement on a hydrocarbon law, which in our view, is critical, not only to national unity, but also to the prosperity of the people of Iraq.

In spite of an increase in the national capacity of Iraq, the need for regional support and international assistance will remain critical. We, therefore, welcomed the convening of the third expanded meeting of neighbouring States of Iraq, held on 22 April 2008, in Kuwait and we are pleased about the upcoming high-level meeting of the International Compact for Iraq, to be held on 29 May in Stockholm, Sweden. The diplomatic initiatives of the Government of Iraq with a view to strengthening ties with neighbouring countries are also a welcome step.

Making Iraq a home for its own people is a daunting challenge. Violence in Iraq has caused serious human displacement. More than 2 million Iraqis have fled to neighbouring States, particularly Syria and Jordan. My delegation welcomes the intention of the Government of Iraq to develop a national strategy to address the question of Iraqi internally displaced persons and refugees. We believe that a regional partnership could help Iraq to tackle this issue.

In this regard, Indonesia welcomes the launching of a major fund-raising and public awareness campaign by the League of Arab States, in partnership with United Nations and other agencies, in Cairo in January 2008.

My delegation is hopeful that the 2008 consolidated appeal for Iraq, which was launched in Baghdad on 12 February 2008, will receive wide response. The appeal is important for the financing of both humanitarian activities and reconstruction programmes in the country.

The role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) will remain critical. We welcome the continued expansion of its activities in accordance with resolution 1770 (2007).

UNAMI's support for the Government of Iraq in promoting reconciliation is commendable. The extensive meetings between Special Representative Staffan de Mistura and various religious and political leaders are an important part of the support.

We also welcome the engagement of UNAMI with the legislative body of the country through its constitutional support activities and with the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq through its electoral assistance.

Finally, my delegation wishes to reaffirm our support for the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq as well as for the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the country.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for briefing the Council on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

We listened carefully to the report of the Permanent Representative of the Unites States, Mr. Khalilzad, on the efforts on the multinational forces. We welcome the participation in today's meeting of the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Mr. Bayati.

I would like to begin by expressing gratitude to all the members of the United Nations mission who are carrying out their important and necessary work in the conditions of war-torn Iraq. We welcome the efforts of the mission in the humanitarian and electoral fields and its work in reforming the Constitution of the country, supporting the political process and involving Iraq's neighbouring States in ways of overcoming the inter-Iraqi crisis.

We take note of the attention that the mission is devoting to the resolution of the problem of Kirkuk. Here, we should once again like to emphasize that questions of the future of this city and of Iraq's internal boundaries in general must be resolved solely on the

basis of compliance with the interests of all the ethno-religious communities residing there and firm guarantees that the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country will be preserved.

The report of the Secretary-General before the Council today, on the whole objectively reflects the situation in Iraq, although at the same time, despite its minute attention to facts, there is an obvious attempt to tone down or side-step the most acute problems in present-day Iraq.

According to statements by Iraqi leaders and the Multinational Force command, some definite successes have been achieved in the security sphere. Possibly, to some extent, this is indeed so. However, the situation remains unstable, and positive changes have not yet become irreversible. This is demonstrated by the fighting in Basra and Baghdad and by the recent terrorists acts in the central regions of the country, which have claimed dozens, if not hundreds, of lives.

Here we note that, unfortunately, the Government of Iraq has not yet been able to take advantage of the somewhat diminished level of violence in the country to establish an effective dialogue among the leading ethnic and religious groups.

Moreover, serious problems remain unresolved within the Iraqi Government itself. The tactical successes achieved in the past six months in improving the situation in Iraq by no means guarantee the preservation in the future of the current positive dynamic in the process of an inter-Iraqi settlement.

At the same time, the key to solving Iraq's numerous problems and to ensuring the country's security lies in the genuine launching of the broadest possible Iraqi dialogue in which mutually acceptable and reasonable compromises are reached. There can be no alternative to the achievement of national accord in the country on the basis of taking into account the interests of all the major forces in Iraq.

In that connection, let me note that the United Nations Mission is becoming more actively involved in achieving that goal. We call upon it to act energetically and consistently — all the more so as complex tasks lie ahead, including, as I have already mentioned, the determination of the status of Kirkuk and the provincial elections.

We would like the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq to devote greater attention to the problem of the protection of human rights in Iraq and to describe in its reports what is taking place in that regard in greater detail. The report (S/2008/266) that we are discussing today contains primarily accounts of successes achieved. While we can acknowledge that in the past three months the situation in the prisons of the Iraqi authorities and the multinational forces has improved radically, we wonder why nothing is said, for example, regarding the more than 400 peaceful civilians who perished as a result of the ongoing siege of the Sadr City area of Baghdad. Why has the subject of the activities and excesses in Iraq of mercenaries from private security companies disappeared from the report?

With regard to the mechanism for multilateral support for a resolution of the Iraqi situation, we are not satisfied with the functions that have been assigned to it, which essentially boil down to technical provisions for the holding of ministerial meetings. In our view, that process requires additional work.

There is one more question that we must bear in mind: the timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops, which, let us admit it quite frankly, many Iraqis consider to be occupying troops. Of course, we are not talking about the immediate evacuation of the multinational forces, as conditions do not yet exist for that. As unequivocally attested to by recent events in the southern regions of Iraq, several governorates elsewhere and the capital itself, the national military and security forces are still not ready to fully shoulder responsibility for providing security in the country and effectively countering various types of militias.

At the same time, if the mandate of the Multinational Force, which expires at the end of this year, is replaced by a bilateral agreement on the continued presence of foreign forces — in other words, a mere change of signs — that would not help to clarify the issue of the continuation of such a presence or to radically improve the situation in Iraq.

In conclusion, I should like to remind the Secretariat of the readiness it expressed in December 2007, when we last discussed the problem of Iraq, to organize with the International Monetary Fund at its Washington headquarters a briefing for the representatives of embassies of Security Council member States on the subject of the Iraq Development Fund. Sufficient time has now elapsed, and I believe it would be of interest to all of us to know what is taking

place today in that closed and opaque structure and whether anything has been done to overcome the glaring shortcomings that we were told of in December by Assistant Secretary-General Sach.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his presentation, as well as Ambassador Khalilzad for his briefing on behalf of the Multinational Force.

Belgium welcomes the improvement in the security situation in Iraq in general, and in Baghdad in particular. However, the situation remains precarious, and vigilance is still warranted. The improvement in the security situation should serve as the foundation for building the State to which the Iraqi people legitimately aspire — one that provides for their security and well-being and respects their fundamental rights.

In that regard, we should emphasize the efforts being made by the Government and security forces of Iraq to regain control over the whole of its territory and its monopoly on the use of force in maintaining order, in particular the operations in the south of the country at the end of March. However, those efforts should be accompanied by a strengthening of the judicial machinery and the security forces, which must be impartial and inclusive if the entire Iraqi population is to have confidence in the rule of law. In that context, Belgium joins in the appeal made by the Secretary-General to all those in a position of responsibility in Iraq to honour the obligations flowing from international humanitarian law and their duty to protect civilians.

With regard to the issue of respect for fundamental rights, we also welcome the positive developments in the matter of access to Iraqi detention centres by the United Nations and by independent observers. That is an example of transparency that we encourage the relevant authorities to continue and expand.

By participating in two elections and a constitutional referendum in 2005, Iraqis at last had an opportunity to forever close the chapter on an oppressive regime and to lay the foundations for a democratic State, thereby realizing the aspirations of the country's various communities.

In the context of ongoing efforts to strengthen the State, already in 2008 we can welcome the adoption of important laws in the areas of justice and transparency, amnesty, the operation of the governorates, and budgetary allocations. Belgium urges the Iraqi authorities and the leaders of all political groups to intensify their legislative and political efforts in numerous crucial areas as they seek, with the assistance the United Nations is mandated to provide, to achieve the essential objective of national reconciliation. In the first instance, we encourage them to step up their efforts aimed at completing the constitutional review process. The Constitutional contract is indeed the only tool that will be able to foster the confidence of the Iraqi people in a State that guarantees the right of all communities to participate in a shared future. Then, they must determine how the country is to be organized. This will depend on the fair and transparent sharing of natural resources through the adoption of a hydrocarbons law and the delimitation of internal borders on the basis of prior consensus. Lastly, the Iraqi authorities and leaders should make greater efforts to finalize the material and legislative preparations that the Electoral Commission needs to organize credible elections in the governorates that will further strengthen the democratic legitimacy of Iraqi institutions.

The situation of the very numerous Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons continues to be a matter of concern. The countries hosting Iraqi refugees and the specialized agencies should be commended for their ongoing efforts in that regard. The international community must continue its efforts, while the Iraqi Government should step up its handling of the situation of its refugees and internally displaced persons.

Although no one can substitute for the efforts of Iraqis themselves, the international community and, in particular, Iraq's neighbours can and should continue to provide assistance to the Iraqi people. First, regional cooperation should be increased. In that regard, the ministerial meeting held in Kuwait last week was a crucial event. The agreement on the mechanism for providing support for the implementation of its decisions, along with initiatives by specific working groups, will make it possible to strengthen dialogue in areas of common interest, including energy, border security and refugees. Secondly, assistance should be provided to ensure that political progress is accompanied by tangible improvements in the living

conditions of Iraqis. In this spirit, and looking ahead to the Stockholm meeting, to be co-chaired by the Government of Iraq and the Secretary-General, Belgium welcomes the progress made towards enhancing the effectiveness of international humanitarian and reconstruction assistance.

Lastly, I would point out that the United Nations should remain at the centre of the international presence in Iraq. We welcome the difficult and courageous work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the rest of the United Nations family, carried out in security conditions that remain difficult. Belgium assures the Council that it will continue to offer its support to this international presence, which is essential for the reconstruction of Iraq.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing. I also thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his report on the efforts of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

Let me begin by expressing our appreciation for the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) under the able leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura. The UNAMI mandate is an important one, that of assisting the Iraqi people and their Government to achieve stability, security and prosperity. Croatia salutes UNAMI's efforts aimed at advancing political dialogue, extending electoral assistance, supporting the constitutional review process and facilitating the regional dialogue process. We commend Mr. De Mistura's approach to resolving disputed internal boundaries.

While not underestimating the remaining challenges, we are pleased at having been presented with a very different picture of Iraq than that of just a year ago. The recent episodes of violence should not obscure the larger trend of improved security that has begun to assert itself with the surge in MNF-I forces. Despite the challenges, there is visible progress in achieving the political, economic and security objectives set by the Government of Iraq, and those achievements should not be minimized. There are continuing improvements in the capacity of Iraq's national security forces, which we see as critical in reaffirming the independence and sovereignty of Iraq. We welcome this progress and commend the resolute steps taken by the Iraqi Government to assume greater responsibility for security, including its response to the threat of sectarianism, terrorism and outlaws.

The institutions of today's Iraq are based on democratic elections and a constitutional referendum. Now they need to be consolidated. Violence must not be allowed to disrupt the political process. By the same token, my delegation continues to believe that, without serious advances in the political process, the recent security gains could be at risk. We share the view of the Secretary-General that more needs to be done to help Iraqi communities resolve the fundamental issues that divide them. The Government of Iraq and all the political actors should rise to the occasion and act responsibly, engaging in a meaningful and inclusive political dialogue, while rejecting sectarianism and extremism.

We are looking forward to the upcoming provincial elections as an occasion to consolidate the democratic institutions of Iraq and advance national reconciliation. We took note of the preparatory activities already under way and hope to see the timely adoption of the governorate elections law. The intensified pace of enacting the relevant legislation should also be applied to other important areas, notably on the issue of hydrocarbon resources, the implementation of article 140 of the constitution and the constitutional revision process.

Dialogue with and the constructive engagement of Iraq's neighbours is another critical component in the long-term stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq. Aiding groups that attack Iraqi and coalition forces and undermine the security and stabilization of Iraq is unacceptable. My delegation takes note of the positive trends in regional dialogue, including last week's third expanded ministerial conference of the neighbouring countries of Iraq, as well as the preceding meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Gulf Cooperation Council in Kuwait. Regular meetings of the three Working Groups are encouraging. We listened with attention to Mr. Pascoe's comments and can only echo his call regarding the need to further strengthen regional dialogue and cooperation.

Moreover, my delegation is mindful of the need to protect and assist displaced and vulnerable Iraqis, through concerted efforts by all concerned parties: the Government of Iraq, Iraq's neighbours and the

international community. Following the launching of the Iraq consolidated appeal in February, we hope to see further contributions and pledges.

At this point, Iraq is still at a stage where it deserves our support — that is, the support of the international community, and particularly the countries of the region — in its transition to a stable, peaceful and prosperous democracy. We look forward to the forthcoming Iraq Compact annual review conference in Stockholm as an opportunity to reaffirm the international commitment to assist in the realization of the aspirations of the Iraqi people. For its part, the Iraqi Government should meet its obligations as a responsible partner and co-owner of this process.

The United Nations is well placed to play a central role in assisting the Iraqi Government in this endeavour, both through the UNAMI mandate and through its leading role in the Iraq Compact. Let me conclude by expressing our support and gratitude to all the United Nations staff on the ground, who under difficult conditions continue to carry out the tasks entrusted to them in resolution 1770 (2007).

Mr. Suescum (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by expressing my thanks to Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and the Permanent Representative of the United States for today's briefings. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Iraq, who is here with us today.

The delegation of Panama is aware of the extent of the challenge before United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Government of Iraq, and also of the very difficult conditions in which they are carrying out their work. Despite the difficulties, the value of their endeavours is very apparent in the results achieved. We recognize the progress that has been achieved in the political assistance efforts made by UNAMI in cooperation with the Government of Iraq, in particular, constitutional support activities, the deployment of national liaison officers to the provinces, and efforts to establish an inclusive electoral system.

The delegation of Panama also notes the recent endeavours for regional dialogue, in particular the diplomatic rapprochement between the Governments of Iraq and Turkey and the interest expressed by some Arab countries regarding the reestablishment of diplomatic missions in Iraq. It is important that such regional dialogue continue, particularly with neighbouring countries, regarding the situation of refugees and the subject of border security.

We also take note of the major efforts being made by the Government of Iraq to rebuild its electoral institutions. However, we are concerned at the lack of progress regarding political dialogue and national reconciliation. We are concerned also about the impact on the civilian population of the resultant political stalemate and sectarian violence.

We echo the appeal made in the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/266) to the various political protagonists to set aside narrow interests and work in a constructive manner to pursue the national interest of Iraq. The Government of Iraq should also strengthen its response to meet the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, both within and outside its borders. We are pleased that high United Nations officials have visited UNAMI's facilities, in particular Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. The humanitarian situation in Iraq deserves the fullest attention by the United Nations. We urge the various United Nations bodies and programmes to continue to coordinate efforts to ensure that the Iraqi people have access to basic services.

Finally, with regard to the subject of human rights, we take note of UNAMI's report dated 15 March on that topic. We also thank the Under-Secretary-General for informing us today that the Government of Iraq has taken measures to improve conditions and to process detainee files. In particular, we take note of UNAMI's visits to a number of prisons at the invitation of the relevant authorities. We hope that such visits will be made to other detention facilities.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to thank Mr. Pascoe for his presentation and the United States Ambassador for his briefing. I should also like to welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

Today, Iraq continues to face immense political, security, humanitarian and economic challenges that carry considerable risk, both for the region and for the international community as a whole.

I should like to address four points. The first concerns violence. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/266), the number of violent

incidents increased once again during the first quarter of 2008, despite a number of improvements at the end of 2007. Violence remains at an excessively high level and is maintaining insecurity and a deteriorated humanitarian situation. The 2.5 million internally displaced persons are a particularly fragile population exposed to violence, and they must be immediately assisted in coping with it.

The conditions for the return of the 2 million refugees will also depend on the improvement of security conditions throughout the country. In that connection, we commend the actions of the neighbouring States that have received a number of them. France will continue to play its part in international efforts, particularly through its contribution to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The recent fighting in Basra and its environs has been a source of great concern. France, like the Secretary-General, believes that all actors concerned must maintain the current decrease in violence and must avoid any provocation. The legitimate objective of a monopoly on legitimate violence by the sovereign Iraqi State can be attained only in a peaceful manner, through dialogue and cooperation.

France is convinced that improvement in the security situation also depends on progress made at the political level. It is urgent that the relaunching of the political dialogue and national reconciliation process be translated into action. Of course, it is primarily up to the Iraqis to define, in a spirit of openness, an equitable sharing of power and resources, which are conditions for a return to civil peace. Major legislation such as the law on hydrocarbons and electoral reform must be adopted without delay. Likewise, the constitutional review process must be effectively implemented. France fully supports the actions of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to contribute to that process.

At the national level, France has proposed, if the Iraqis consider it useful, hosting a meeting for all Iraqi officials who feel that there is a need to relaunch the political dialogue in a neutral setting far from the pressures on the ground and with the broadest possible participation. As Bernard Kouchner indicated during the recent Kuwait conference, such an exercise could certainly take place within the framework of the French presidency of the European Union.

However — and this is my third point — the neighbouring States also have an important role to play. The conference held in Kuwait on 22 April made it possible to highlight the importance of the neighbouring-country process, which France fully supports. It is essential that every neighbouring State show a sincere will to contribute to the return of stability in Iraq. France believes that the current momentum must be followed up by specific decisions, tangible measures and constructive commitments. The restoration of normalcy thus depends on the presence of diplomatic missions in Baghdad. Likewise, any direct or indirect intervention by a neighbouring country in Iraq can only lead to greater instability and risks for all. Here again, UNAMI's efforts to create an ad hoc mechanism to support the neighbouring-country process, under the auspices of the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are fully supported by France.

France also wishes to welcome the first results achieved on the ground by UNAMI, thanks in large part to the personal commitment of Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, whom we commend for his courage, perseverance and effectiveness. This effort must be supported in the various areas covered by the Mission's mandate. In addition to the aforementioned topics, I am thinking of the difficult issues of disputed internal borders and the implementation of article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, regarding which UNAMI's patient efforts have already made some progress possible. I am also thinking of UNAMI's election-related activities. As emphasized by the Secretary-General, it is important that the Independent High Electoral Commission receive all the support it needs from the Iraqi authorities. Finally, I am thinking of UNAMI's activities aimed at the promotion of and respect for human rights in Iraq, in particular with regard to detainees. France and the European Union will continue to assist in unifying the rule of law in Iraq, which could contribute to the full and complete implementation of human rights.

In conclusion, I would recall that France is also involved on a bilateral basis in the political and humanitarian areas and in cooperation in the fields of governance, health, education and training. France has opened an embassy office in Erbil and plans to open another in the south of the country when security conditions permit. We are planning to develop a chain of medical treatment facilities. We wish to be present

in Iraq wherever security conditions enable us to be, using local intermediaries if necessary. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs has shared his intention to pay another visit to Iraq. Thus we shall accompany the diverse Iraqi people on the path of peace, which they deserve after so many years of difficulties.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I wish to join colleagues in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his presentation on the Secretary-General's report (S/2008/266). I should like to ask him to pass on our thanks to the United Nations and all the team working on Iraq. They do very good work, and I would like to see that acknowledged today. I also thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his presentation on behalf of the multinational force in Iraq. It is also very good to see the Iraqi Ambassador here too, as many colleagues have noted today.

I think it is clear that Iraq continues to face some very big challenges. But it was also welcome to see today that most speakers acknowledged that since our last discussion there have been significant and positive developments in terms of both politics and security. I welcome what the Libyan representative said about that and also about reconciliation, which I thought was a very good point.

Permit me to begin by highlighting three points. On the political front, the executive and the legislature have made concerted efforts to adopt laws aimed at uniting Iraq. This year, the Council of Representatives has passed laws on amnesty, provincial powers, accountability in justice and pensions, and it has agreed on a new national flag and on the largest-ever Iraqi budget. In passing those laws, Iraqi politicians have been engaged in rigorous discussions, arguing in their corners, but, crucially, reaching compromises. We urge that this spirit of cooperation continue with a view to delivering crucial legislation, including allowing Iraq to manage and maximize the benefits of its natural resources.

My second point concerns elections, which provide the opportunity for under-represented groups to have a say in their future and in the future of Iraq. We therefore echo the call of the Secretary-General for political decisions to be taken to ensure that Iraqi institutions are able to complete the necessary preparations. In addition, the passage of the Provincial Powers Law, which includes a commitment to hold provincial elections later this year, is very welcome. It also includes an agreement that all parties must reject violence and engage in the political process.

My third point relates to security. As the Secretary-General acknowledges in his report, and as Ambassador Khalilzad set out today, there have been important recent improvements in the security situation, and these build on the progress made during the latter part of 2007. The Government of Iraq's actions in Basra, Sadr City and Mosul over the past month send a clear signal about its intention to uphold the rule of law and to clamp down on terrorist, criminal and illegal armed groups regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation.

The response of the Iraqi political parties has been equally clear, with cross-party support in Baghdad. The Political Council for National Security has given its firm support to the Government's and the Iraqi security forces' stance against militias. That has kept the door open for those willing to reject violence and to engage in the political process, and it has urged those parties that have withdrawn from the National Unity Government to return.

The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting and promoting this emerging convergence of Iraqi public opinion, and we do this through our public support to the Government, in our contacts with Iraqi parties and by our actions on the ground in cooperation with Iraq's authorities. But it is not only the broader international community as a whole that must support Iraq. As we have heard today from a number of speakers, efforts by Iraq's neighbours and States in the region will have the greatest effect on the ground. Along with the other representatives, I would like welcome the communiqué of the latest expanded neighbours ministerial conference held last week in Kuwait, which reaffirms the region's support for Iraq.

I would like to reiterate our view that any external links to armed groups in Iraq outside the political process, either through the supply of weapons, training or funding, are unacceptable. These weapons have been used to attack the security forces of the democratically elected and sovereign Government of Iraq, as well as the multinational forces. We look to those who have influence on such parties to bring that influence to bear.

I would like to say a word, if I may, about my own Government's contribution. We are pleased to make a full contribution to the reconstruction and

development of Iraq in the political, economic and security fields. We recognize the continuing need to help alleviate the humanitarian situation caused by the violence that I mentioned a few moments ago. The United Kingdom welcomes the 2008 consolidated appeal for Iraq, and I would like to encourage Member States to make further contributions in support of the United Nations and its implementing partners. My Government has committed $34 million in response to the appeal.

On the economy, in parallel, we continue to work with regional and Iraqi partners to promote economic development in the south of Iraq. In March, the Invest Basra 2008 conference was held in Kuwait with 70 representatives of international investors and Iraqis from the Basra Development Commission, the provincial government and Basra business interests. The United Kingdom will be following up with a further event in London today with senior Iraqis and business leaders to highlight the opportunities for private investment in the south of Iraq.

We are also continuing to provide mentoring and training to the Iraqi army and police, with the aim of developing their capacity and confidence. They will ultimately be able to ensure security without the need for our assistance. At the same time, I would like to say that during the Iraqi security forces' operation in Basra recently my Government provided logistical support and conducted specific strike operations to help protect the Iraqi security forces.

Finally, the United Kingdom welcomes the support provided by the United Nations and the Secretary-General's Special Representative to Iraq through their work in-country and through the Iraq neighbours process. Security Council resolution 1770 (2007) set out an ambitious but essential role for the United Nations. I would like to encourage Member States to do our utmost to support the United Nations, including through answering the call of the Secretary-General for military advisers and for further contributions to the trust fund that provides for middle-ring security to protect UNAMI's facilities and personnel.

Mr. Bui The Giang (Viet Nam): Let me join other Council members in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe for his briefing on the situation in Iraq and his introduction of the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) (S/2008/266). We also thank Mr. Khalilzad for his update on the multinational forces in Iraq.

My delegation shares the Secretary-General's positive view of the initial achievements of the people of Iraq in strengthening unity, stability and economic growth. We welcome the positive developments that have resulted from those efforts, such as the decline in the level of violence across the country, the gradual assumption by local authorities of control of competencies for security and the passage of key pieces of legislation. We are encouraged by the announcement by Prime Minister al-Maliki on 24 April 2008 that all political factions have agreed to rejoin the Cabinet, and we call upon all the parties concerned to build on the momentum for the well-being and interests of the entire nation.

The improvement of Iraq's international relations, especially those with neighbouring countries, should be supported and encouraged to continue, as that is essential long-term peace and stability not only in Iraq but also throughout the whole region.

However, we concur with the Secretary-General's concerns about formidable challenges, including the outbreak of sectarian violence, disputed internal boundaries, pervasive poverty and marginalization, substantial foreign debt and a lack of resources, as well as the worsening of the human rights and humanitarian situation, especially the situation concerning internally displaced persons, refugees and prisoners, as partially reflected in the UNAMI report issued on 15 March 2008.

While reaffirming Viet Nam's continued support for the efforts of the Iraqi Government and other concerned parties in consolidating peace and security, advancing political dialogue and strengthening national reconciliation, my delegation believes that more tangible progress should be sustained in improving the rule of law, countering corruption, curbing illicit use of weapons and disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating militias and armed groups.

Recognizing the organic relationship between security and development, we note the steps taken by the Government of Iraq to galvanize fundamental socio-economic reforms, poverty reduction, public resource management, governance and institutional capacity-building, basic services delivery and social welfare development.

We recognize the important role of the United Nations in assisting Iraq with the political process, regional dialogue, economic reconstruction and humanitarian relief. We call upon United Nations agencies to make further contributions in this regard.

We commend UNAMI for its work in helping the Iraqi Government address key priority issues, as mandated by resolution 1770 (2007), such as national reconciliation, constitutional support and electoral and humanitarian assistance. In the same vein, we hope that the upcoming high-level meeting of the International Compact with Iraq, in Stockholm, will further consolidate efforts of the international community and countries of the region in helping Iraq better address various security, humanitarian, national reconciliation and socio-economic development challenges in the medium term.

Let me take this opportunity, once again, to reiterate Viet Nam's solidarity with and support for the Government and the people of Iraq in their quest for lasting peace, stability and development.

Mr. Spatafora (Italy): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Pascoe and Ambassador Khalilzad for their very clear, informative and focused briefings. We welcome Ambassador Al Bayati. I think his presence is very important to all of us. I wish to express our equally strong appreciation for the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/266) as well as warm and sincere thanks to Special Representative Staffan de Mistura and to the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for the way in which they have been performing and for what they have been achieving in a very difficult, delicate and politically sensitive environment. Indeed, as Under-Secretary-General Pascoe said, we are proud of what they are doing and of how they are upholding the United Nations flag. As Mr. Pascoe said, the United Nations reputation is growing, and I think it is very important to see that the United Nations credibility is growing. It is important in Iraq and, of course, elsewhere.

The Organization's reputation and credibility are growing also because, as Under-Secretary-General Pascoe said, we have seen and are seeing an increased and enhanced role for the United Nations. That is what we wanted — an increased presence on the ground; an increased involvement of UNAMI in a number of issues that Mr. Pascoe mentioned; and facilitating, giving direction and consolidating the political and electoral processes.

Italy shares the analysis of the Secretary-General in his most recent report to the effect that a sustainable stabilization of the security situation in Iraq can be successfully achieved only in the framework of a new social pact based on the inclusion in the political process of the broadest possible spectrum of representative parties and on the extension of rights and benefits without ethnic or religious discrimination.

There are many challenges Iraq has to face on that path, as has been recalled by previous speakers, including such issues as the fair distribution of State revenues and the management of natural resources, the balance between central and provincial authorities, the disbanding of all militias, and the development of a reliable national police. We agree in that regard with the emphasis that the Secretary-General's report places on a rapid approval of a hydrocarbon law that defines the framework for the proper use of natural resources on a national basis.

We would like to commend the Government of Iraq on the progress it has made in the political sector and on the steps it has taken towards national reconciliation. It is working in the right direction. Over the past year, the Government of Iraq has been making progress in its efforts to confront terrorism and militias. We appreciate the growing autonomy demonstrated by the Iraqi security forces and we encourage them to make further progress in that field. Those efforts must be encouraged and actively supported by the whole of the international community, and foremost by the countries of the region, whose positive engagement through the expanded neighbouring States process plays an essential role.

We welcome, in that regard, the recent ministerial meeting that took place in Kuwait City on 22 April. I should like to reiterate here, as we did in Kuwait, Italy's strong commitment to its support for Iraq and its people in their aspiration to build a better future. The role of neighbouring countries in supporting the stabilization of Iraq could also be further enhanced by providing debt relief, in accordance with the Paris Club terms, and by contributing to the implementation of the International Compact with Iraq, also through the multilateral channel of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq.

As I have said before, we appreciate the activities and progress of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. We continue to believe that the United Nations has a fundamental and central role to play in Iraq in supporting Iraqi ownership, and we welcome the high number of high-level visits paid by United Nations officials to Iraq in the past month, one of the most recent of which was that of Under-Secretary-General Pascoe just a few days ago, on which he briefed us. Such visits prove the commitment of the Organization to the Iraqi people. It is our hope that the Mission can further develop a broader mandate, focusing also on technical support for the Iraqi authorities, particularly regarding budget execution. Helping Iraq unlock its own considerable resources remains a top priority for all of us.

I would like to conclude by stressing that point, and I commend Special Representative De Mistura for what he is doing.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): We, too, thank Under-Secretary-General Pascoe for his briefing on the implementation of the mandate entrusted to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) under resolution 1770 (2007). We also thank Ambassador Khalilzad for his statement on the activities of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

We also welcome the presence at this debate of our colleague, the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

As many have noted here, Iraq is still facing major political, security, humanitarian and economic challenges. Regarding the political process, the challenges to be met remain numerous, particularly with respect to power-sharing and the distribution of the country's wealth. It is all the more urgent to achieve consensus in those areas given Iraq's enormous wealth, of which its people await the opportunity to enjoy the dividends mortgaged by war.

We note, however, some progress towards national reconciliation thanks to the compromises achieved among various parliamentary groups, which, following the adoption of the Justice and Accountability Law on 12 January, were able to enact the Law on Governorates not Organized into a Region, the General Amnesty Law and the 2008 budget. Such a climate should help to strengthen democratic openness and establish greater trust among the political players.

However, regarding the regional implications of the conflict, it is encouraging to note that the Iraqi Government has launched significant initiatives to strengthen Iraq's cooperation links with neighbouring countries and regional organizations, in particular the League of Arab States. Bahrain's announcement of its intention to reopen its embassy in Iraq and the prospects for the opening of other diplomatic missions represent tangible results and are the sign of a certain revitalization of State institutions. We also welcome the efforts that have led to the withdrawal of Turkish forces from northern Iraq.

The security situation remains generally difficult in terms of incidents, including suicide attacks, that continue to occur throughout the country, sowing massive and indiscriminate destruction. Clearly, that state of affairs is closely linked to the political situation, which it is absolutely necessary to pacify. The extension of the freeze on military activities announced by Moqtada al-Sadr and the joint action conducted by the Iraqi Government and the Multinational Force in Iraq to neutralize and prevent attacks are important in that regard, since they should help to strengthen national security and unity.

On the humanitarian and human rights level, we are particularly concerned about the tragedies experienced daily by the civilian population, women and children in particular, as well as about the difficulties encountered in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those vulnerable sectors. We urge all parties to ensure strict respect for humanitarian law.

On a more positive note, we welcome the recent decision of the Iraqi Government to ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture, the full effectiveness of which we hope for and encourage.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq is a major actor in the mobilization of domestic and external efforts and energies to ensure the restoration of peace to Iraq, as well as reconstruction and national development. My delegation recognizes UNAMI's decisive action, especially as reflected, first, in the maintenance of ongoing contacts with the political, governmental, parliamentary, diplomatic and other authorities, and with the military offices based in Baghdad, to encourage political dialogue and the quest for national reconciliation. Second is its contribution to the search for a solution to the problem of the borders, which it has made a priority. Third is its participation,

together with several political and religious figures, in activities dealing with the political process and the establishment of a liaison with local authorities, making it possible to have a better grasp of realities in the field, particularly in Kirkuk, Mosul, Tikrit and Irbil.

The fourth action is good cooperation with the Independent High Electoral Commission and the governmental and parliamentary authorities to ensure the proper conduct of the electoral process so that the elections are credible and the results will be accepted by the Iraqi people. For that, as has been noted in the Secretary-General's report, the relevant political decisions must be taken to ensure the success of this process.

The fifth and final action is the contribution to international coordination and mobilization, as well as to the strengthening of national capacities within the framework of the Iraq 2008 consolidated appeal. Here we congratulate the Mission and the entire United Nations system for their unprecedented dedication. The international community must continue to further express its solidarity to the Iraqi people. We hope that it will take advantage of the opportunity provided by the Stockholm conference of 29 May 2008 on the Compact with Iraq, and we wish all success in that.

The contributions to the initiatives for a settlement of the internal border conflicts and to strengthening capacity in the areas of human rights and Iraq's relations with its neighbours also must be credited to UNAMI.

With regard to regional dialogue, my delegation welcomes the holding on 22 April 2008 in Kuwait of the third expanded ministerial meeting of countries bordering Iraq. The results of that significant meeting, we believe and hope, will contribute to the establishment of a better climate of confidence in the region.

Iraq is at a turning point in its development. More than ever, it needs the firm support of the international community to emerge from the crisis and to rebuild. The international community must also strengthen its support for UNAMI's efforts, to which it has given the mandate to assist the country along that path.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to begin by welcoming the Permanent Representative of Iraq. We are also grateful for the report of the Secretary-General and the briefing by Under-Secretary-General Pascoe, and for the briefing by Ambassador Khalilzad on behalf of the multinational force.

My thanks also go to you, Mr. President, for convening this quarterly meeting to know about the situation in Iraq. The rationale for the meeting is clear. We gathered to hear reports from the Secretariat and the multinational force about the situation the ground. We will also be hearing the assessment of the Permanent Representative of Iraq on behalf of his Government.

In the view of my delegation, it is entirely logical that the Iraqi representative should have the opportunity to give us his views, together with the reports from the Under-Secretary-General and the representative of the multinational force. In keeping with paragraph 29 of the note by the Council President, in document S/2006/507:

(*spoke in English*)

> "The Security Council agrees that, when non-members are invited to speak to the Council, those who have a direct interest in the outcome of the matter under consideration may speak prior to Council members, if appropriate."

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Therefore the Council should have heard from the party having direct interest, in this case the delegation of Iraq, before members took the floor. That would simply give us a clearer view of the situation we are discussing and would allow the Council to comply with its mandate in a more efficient and effective manner.

My delegation's position on this matter is not new. In fact, three months ago, concerning the same agenda item, we raised the same point, speaking after the delegation of Iraq. We felt our concern was clear. Perhaps it is necessary to return to this matter in our consultations. We hope we can give full effect to the criterion set out in paragraph 29 of the note by the President to which I just referred.

Like other Council members, Costa Rica welcomes and supports the efforts by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), the United Nations specialized agencies and the non-governmental organizations, which are pursuing their difficult tasks in a highly unstable security

situation. As long as the political, security and humanitarian problems persist in Iraq, the foundations of a federal, democratic, pluralist and unified State — which we all hope to see one day — will remain fragile.

In this regard I wish to recall to the words of the Secretary-General that Under-Secretary-General Pascoe quoted: "Whatever one's previous views on Iraq, the whole world has a responsibility and an interest today in helping bring peace and prosperity to the people of that country". Costa Rica therefore calls on the Council to give priority to further pursuing the political processes of national reconciliation, dialogue and strengthening the legitimacy of the Iraqi authorities. In that connection, the review of the constitution and the promulgation of other necessary laws to achieve those objectives are of priority importance.

Costa Rica also urges the Council to support more broadly the participation of Iraq and its people and authorities in the reconstruction of the country. In short, Costa Rica urges UNAMI, the United Nations agencies, the neighbouring countries and the international community present in Iraq to step up their endeavours to favour growing prominence of the people and Government of Iraq in the construction of their own future.

My delegation is very concerned to see the results of the UNAMI report on the situation of human rights of Iraq. We consider that the violent daily death of human beings for political, ethnic, religious and gender reasons is not the course by which to promote justice and the reconciliation of Iraqi society. Therefore we welcome the fact that Iraq has ratified the Convention against Torture, and we urge ratification also of its Optional Protocol and strict implementation of those two important international instruments.

We are also particularly concerned to hear the statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Coomaraswamy, on 25 April, in which she referred to the situation of Iraqi children as intolerable. My country also condemns sexual and gender-based violence, exemplified by the crimes of honour — an unquestionably abominable practice. It is thus essential to continue to work on the ratification and correct implementation of mechanisms for accountability and to strengthen justice as necessary and unmistakable steps in strengthening the process of national reconciliation, the rule of law and the fight against impunity.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of South Africa.

We, too, thank the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, for his briefing on the report before us, as well as the representative of the United States, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, for his briefing on the activities of the multinational force, the MNF-I.

We note with concern that, despite improvements in the general security situation towards the end of 2007, there has been a recent deterioration and the overall political and security situation in Iraq remains fragile.

We reiterate that any resolution to the conflict in Iraq has to include an all-inclusive political process and national reconciliation, as well as constructive dialogue with all neighbouring States. The adoption of legislation such as the Amnesty Law and the Justice and Accountability Law is welcome as a step towards reconciling the different parties. It is our hope that the Iraqi parties will continue to find ways to further reconcile. We note that the adoption of the Amnesty Law, for example, has led to the Sunni-Tawatuq block agreeing to return to the cabinet after a long boycott.

We support the call by the Secretary-General in his report for influential public figures and parties to work towards political dialogue, compromise and "the recognition that Iraq's future depends on its leaders pursuing the Iraqi national interest rather than ... party, ethnic or sectarian interests" (*S/2008/266, para. 65*).

The role of regional actors cannot be overemphasized. My delegation supports efforts aimed at addressing the matters of violence, internally displaced persons and refugees. We positively view the series of discussions, including the recently held meeting in Kuwait, between Iraq and all of its neighbours working in partnership to ensure stability, security and economic reconstruction in the region. Regional cooperation is necessary in ensuring stability, not only for Iraq, but for the entire region.

We continue to be concerned about the human rights situation in Iraq. We call on all parties, including the MNF-I, to ensure that human rights are respected and international humanitarian law is applied,

especially in regard to the use of force and the holding of detainees. We are disturbed by the reports of the treatment of detainees, as outlined in the latest human rights report of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

My delegation supported the adoption of resolution 1790 (2007) renewing the mandate of the MNFI, because the Iraqi Government is of the view that its continued presence would be necessary for security. We note the Iraqi Government expectation that this could be the final mandate renewal of for the MNF-I.

Resolution 1790 (2007) extended the mandate of the International Advisory Monitoring Board (IAMB). South Africa welcomes this decision but remains concerned that repeated findings of serious irregularities with regard to the disbursement of funds from the Development Fund for Iraq and the oversight of oil fields and contractors have not been acted upon. We were told that there would be a Security Council meeting to discuss the findings of the independent auditors attached to the IAMB. This meeting is long overdue, and we call for it as soon as possible.

We conclude by reiterating that, notwithstanding the event that led to the current situation, the Security Council has a responsibility to ensure that the powers granted to the MNF-I are exercised in a manner consistent with the decisions of the Council, that Iraq's natural resources and the funds in the Development Fund for Iraq are used for the benefit for the Iraqi people, and that international law and human rights are upheld and respected by all parties.

I now resume my function as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I am confident that your wisdom and competence will continue to contribute to the success of the Council. I would also like to extend my thanks to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, for his wise leadership in steering the Council's work last month.

I would like to add my voice to that of all member States in welcoming the statement of the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Pascoe, and the statement of Ambassador Khalilzad on behalf of the multinational force in Iraq — MNF-I.

My delegation has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), as contained in document S/2008/266. I would like to take this opportunity to express appreciation for the role played by the Mission, led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to assist the people and the Government of Iraq. We wish him success in his duties.

My delegation would like to make the following comments on the development in Iraq during the past three months.

We have seen during this last period the ratification of important laws such as the Justice and Accountability Law, which replaced the de-baathification law and has helped the reconciliation process. In February, the Council of Representatives endorsed the Iraqi General Amnesty Law and the law of the provincial councils' authorities and approved the general budget of 2008. The implementation of the Amnesty Law is one of the main elements in the attempt to move towards national reconciliation and to create an atmosphere of stability and to restore security in Iraq. It has also provided a new impetus to the political process and a strong incentive to re-shape the map of Iraq.

It should be noted that the relevant Iraqi authorities, in cooperation with the judicial authorities, are working continuously to examine the files of detainees, including in Amnesty Law, and to follow the rehabilitation of those who were released. Dozens of investigative committees have been set up to work intensively on the implementation of the Amnesty Law and to expedite the release of those included in it and to allow their return to their families and communities to participate in rebuilding their country. Of the 37,000 detainees under custody of United States and Iraqi forces and who are included in the Amnesty Law, 28,242 have been released in the period since the enforcement of the Amnesty Law began in February up to 10 April.

Concerning the approval of Iraq's 2008 budget, which amounted to $48 billion, the Iraqi Government will issue a supplementary budget at the end of June to add $5 billion, due to the increased income of Iraq as a result of the high prices of oil. That will contribute to

enhancing the State's ability to provide basic services to Iraqi citizens and to support displaced families, to strengthening the subsidies of those included in the social welfare network and to carrying out reconstruction projects.

We must point out that Iraq has ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and, under the auspices of the United Nations, an anti-corruption convention was held in Baghdad in March 2008, where the Iraqi Government said that the danger of corruption is no less than that of terrorism to the reconstruction of Iraq.

With regard to the Iraqi Government's efforts to improve the living standards and alleviate the burdens of Iraqi citizens, the Council of Representatives has passed a law to increase salaries of all State and public-sector employees to ensure better living standards for all Iraqis.

The Council of Ministers has also launched a series of initiatives to create new job opportunities that contribute to the revitalization of economic activity and address the problem of unemployment — for example, by providing small and soft loans to citizens. For that purpose, the Government has allocated $60 million to each governorate and $100 million each to Baghdad, Mosul and Basra. Those initiatives also include expanding the network of those covered by social protection programmes, for which the Cabinet has decided to create 130,000 jobs, which should be filled by the end of May 2008. That is in addition to the 2,000 job opportunities provided by the Ministry for the Environment in its demining campaign.

With regard to the Iraqi Government's efforts to assist Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons, the Ministry for Displacement and Migration, in coordination and cooperation with the High Commissioner for Refugees, is working to provide assistance to them. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for the efforts made by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Government has announced the allocation of grants in the amount of ID150,000, for a period of six months, for families forcibly displaced from their homes. The Government has also begun to establish 300 housing units in the province of Al-Amara, which are to be distributed to displaced families. The Iraqi Government has an initiative in place with UNHCR to develop a national strategy to assist Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, and it has also pledged to provide the appropriate atmosphere to secure the return of Iraqis to their country to participate in the reconstruction process. In that regard, I would like to express our gratitude to the countries hosting Iraqi refugees. We stress our keenness to make every effort to normalize the situation in Iraq and provide the appropriate atmosphere to secure their return.

My delegation would like to highlight the development of the security situation throughout Iraq in the light of recent military operations carried out by the Iraqi armed forces. The Iraqi Government is determined to limit weapons to the hands of the Government, disband militias and ensure that there is no army except for the Iraqi army. It is also determined to continue to pursue gangs, outlaws and terrorists who have not laid down their arms, in order to eliminate all criminal activities.

At the same time, the Iraqi Government reiterates its position: to rely on the rational political dialogue required for reconciliation and to ease the political tension. It has called upon all those who take up weapons against the Government and civilians to lay down their weapons and to allow Iraqi citizens to live freely in their country. It has also emphasized that it will not hesitate to pursue all criminals who threaten civilians.

My Government stresses that the recent military operation carried out by the Iraqi armed forces is a message to all outlaws that they can no longer be above the law. The Government is determined to fight to prevent their activities of murder, robbery, assault on public assets, oil smuggling, organized crime, the infiltration of Government agencies and the spread of corruption at many levels.

The Iraqi Government emphasizes that those operations do not target any particular political current, but rather are a message to the world in general and to the Iraqi people in particular. That message reflects the justice and neutrality of the Iraqi Government and its non-sectarian orientation in punishing all outlaws and sustaining those who abide by State law.

The recent military operations had the support of the Iraqi people and all political blocs, which stood firmly with the Government and its various security agencies in response to the militias and outlaws regardless of their affiliation. They valued the role

played by the security forces to enforce law and order in Basra and other provinces. That is a significant development in the political process towards strengthening national unity and establishing democratic life.

Nevertheless, the Government will continue to devote its efforts and resources to relieving the troubled areas subjected to military operations and to work towards improving basic services for all people in various regions and provinces. The Council of Ministers has decided to allocate $350 million for the provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul, to support service projects. One hundred million dollars has also been allocated to support service projects in Sadr City, as well as $50 million for the Al-Shaala district of Baghdad.

At the political level, my Government is determined to bring into being a Government of national unity on a nationally agreed upon basis. The immediate return of the various political blocs that have withdrawn will accelerate the formation of the national unity Government. Despite difficulties and challenges, the political process is moving forward, democratic transformation, positive political developments and co-existence among the Iraqi people will all pave the way for reconstruction projects in Iraq.

After all the wars, the deterioration in the security situation and the destruction of infrastructure, it is important to recognize the efforts of the Awakening Councils and the tribes and their significant and effective role with the Iraqi security forces in order to provide protection to troubled areas, reduce violence in Iraq and undermine the acts of Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups in Iraq. The Iraqi Government has pledged to integrate eligible members of the Awakening Council into Iraqi security forces, in accordance with a Government plan.

With regard to the national reconciliation process, the Iraqi Government has announced that that approach is not so much a political slogan as a comprehensive strategic vision to reconstruct Government agencies on a correct basis. The process will emphasize the culture of dialogue and tolerance and the process of renouncing disagreement and moving on from the past.

The national reconciliation process has resulted in the formation of 49 supporting councils. Thirteen councils are yet to be established in a number of Iraq's provinces and cities that used to be hot spots. The councils receive full support from the Government.

Reconciliation efforts have led to containing more than 35,000 former members of armed groups and Al-Qaida. Today they are participating in the Awakening Councils side by side with the Iraqi armed forces, in order to establish security and stability. The Government has provided the injured members of the councils with special grants, in addition to the retirement rights that are given to members of the security agencies.

Also, the Government has reinstated more than 98,000 members of the former army to serve in the current army and guaranteed the right to retire to more than 21,000 members. Retirement funds have been granted to more than 48,000 members of dismantled agencies. Moreover, 5,000 job opportunities to work in various civilian agencies were created for former members of the military-industrial sector with postgraduate degrees.

The past few months have witnessed increased regional activity as regards the situation in Iraq. In addition to the expanded meeting of Iraq's neighbouring countries held in Kuwait on 22 April 2008, the three working groups — concerning security, energy and refugees — that emerged from the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting have met in Damascus, Istanbul and Amman. All those meetings supported the efforts of the Iraqi Government to establish security and stability, disband and disarm the militias and confront terrorism, which threatens several countries in the region. Such a threat requires collective efforts to confront its dangers and consequences.

The victory in Iraq and our country's war against violence and terrorism will not be confined to Iraq alone, but will also enhance the security and stability of the entire region. The Prime Minister of Iraq addressed the Kuwait meeting with a message requesting all neighbouring countries to increase their efforts to prevent the infiltration of terrorists into Iraq and to eliminate their sources of funding. The Prime Minister further requested the forgiveness of debts and a reduction in the percentage of compensation in order to send a positive message to the Iraqi people: that brotherly countries have the genuine intention to assist them in overcoming the obstacles and difficulties they are facing and in expediting the execution of reconstruction projects.

It should be noted that more than 30 friendly countries — members and non-members of the Paris

Club alike — have cancelled Iraq debts totalling $23 billion. We hope that our Arab brothers will take the initiative to cancel Iraq's debts to them, following the example set by Iraq's other friends. The Prime Minister also called upon brotherly Arab countries to reinstate their diplomatic relations with Iraq, given that there are more than 45 diplomatic missions, consulates and international organizations operating in Iraq. The Prime Minister expressed the readiness of the Iraqi Government to provide security and protection for all diplomatic missions and their personnel.

Iraq considers the agreement reached at the Kuwait meeting to hold the next neighbours' meeting in Baghdad to be among the positive indications that the Government of Iraq is capable of hosting such an important event and of providing all the measures required.

Iraq welcomes the willingness of the brotherly State of Kuwait to start bilateral consultations with the Iraqi Government under the umbrella of the United Nations Compensation Commission regarding the amount of $24 billion remaining after finalization of the payment of environmental compensation. The Government of Iraq considers this intention to be a step in the right direction on the part of our brothers in Kuwait, taking into consideration what is stated in paragraph 21 of resolution 1483 (2003): that the Security Council

> "[d]ecides further that 5 per cent of the proceeds referred to in paragraph 20 above shall be deposited into the Compensation Fund established in accordance with resolution 687 (1991) and subsequent relevant resolutions and that, unless an internationally recognized, representative government of Iraq and the Governing Council of the United Nations Compensation Commission, in the exercise of its authority over methods of ensuring that payments are made into the Compensation Fund, decide otherwise, this requirement shall be binding on a properly constituted, internationally recognized, representative government of Iraq and any successor thereto".

Allow me to emphasize that Iraq is positively looking forward to the International Compact meeting that will be hosted by Sweden on 29 May 2008 for the purpose of mobilizing the efforts of the international community to promote development in Iraq and to review the attainment of commitments made by Iraq and the international community.

Furthermore, we would like to stress the vital role that is being played by the United Nations in Iraq, in accordance with resolution 1770 (2007), in achieving the advancement of political dialogue and national reconciliation in a manner that would contribute to the fulfilment of the Iraq Compact and assist Iraq in achieving its national vision.

The Stockholm conference will be an important forum in which to review economic and political developments in Iraq and future prospects conducive to assisting the reconstruction process.

In 2007 and 2008, the Iraqi Government settled $23 billion of the total external debt burden of $75 billion. The Government seeks to settle its debt in accordance with the pledges made at the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting in May 2007. Iraq's economy grew by 10.4 per cent during 2007. The International Monetary Fund estimates that in December 2007 consumer price inflation had stabilized at 20 per cent, down from 64.8 per cent in December 2006.

Allow me in conclusion to highlight the request of my Government for the support of the international community in putting an end to, and preventing, foreign interference in Iraq's internal affairs, which destabilizes the country and has a negative impact on its security. I would like also to express my appreciation to all countries that continue to support Iraq, to those that have not closed their missions in Iraq and to those that have reopened their embassies, such as the Kingdom of Bahrain, which has announced that it will send its ambassador to Baghdad in the near future. I invite all friendly and brotherly countries to reopen their missions in Iraq and to continue their relations with the Iraqi people.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.